



*'And the city has no need of the sun or moon to shine on it,
for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb.'* Revelation 21.23

This is my blood:

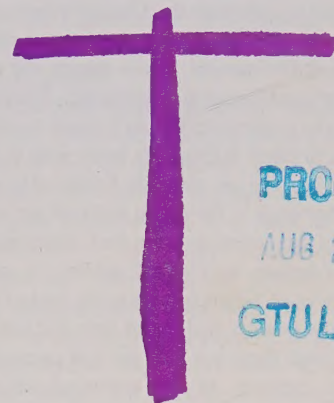
**Sacrament and community
on an outer estate
by Malcolm Guite TSSF**



I serve as a priest on a large 'over-spill' estate outside an ex-county town; a place where there is a great deal of human misery, poverty and oppression but also many hidden joys, unlooked-for solidarities, and increasingly abundant points of presence; a place where suddenly, one catches at the hem of the incarnation.

When I first arrived I asked the tiny congregation, drawn almost entirely from the estate itself, what it was they felt God had given them from the whole treasury of the Gospel, to show forth and share with their neighbours. They replied: "That something is still sacred, that there is a candle still burning." And indeed, a sense of the sacred in our midst, of both a literal and a spiritual flame in darkness, of, as it were, suddenly coming across the holy where we least expect it, has been a key to the life, discernment and mission of the church. The theological key to our identity was put into my hands as I meditated on that text in Galatians about Christ being made a curse for our sakes: "... having become a curse

for us - for it is written 'cursed be everyone who hangs upon a tree' - that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith". Golgotha is the place of rejection, of exclusion from covenant and involvement in society. I suddenly came to realise that the Estate was the town's Golgotha, a place where people feel dumped, a place where the righteous dump their judgements and project their sins. Indeed, the very degrading use of the term 'over-spill' shows us that the outer or over-spill estates are always Golgothas to the Jerusalems of suburban respectability. But it is on Golgotha that we find the cross and on the cross Christ as the absolute and immediate point of God's presence on earth. So I felt that I would find Christ more easily



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Theological Trends

Theological trends change with culture and society, as new knowledge and new world views alter our perspectives. In this issue of *franciscan*, two academics, a cathedral canon and three parish clergy write of the revelation of God in every facet of daily life and thought; from the detailed study of the Bible or the imagery of hymns, to the vulnerable, the stressful and the ordinary pursuits of humanity.

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and obviously present on the Estate's Golgotha than in the town's Jerusalem.

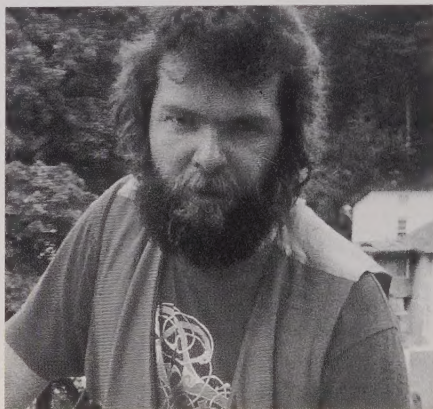
The first practical outworking of this insight was to make links between the church and the unemployed. We worked together with a body which was providing work experience and further training to middle- and long-term unemployed people, together with the help of retired artisans, on a project to refurbish the Church's decaying sixties fabric. These were a group of often highly-skilled people whose talents the rest of society had forgotten or neglected. Amongst them was a carpenter whom I asked to carve a cross to place high on the outer wall of the church looking out over the Estate. He was the oldest man in the group and told me with tears in his eyes that he had once made crosses before, as a young soldier, to mark the graves of fallen friends at the end of the war. His country had found little use for his skills since then, but now his last cross lifts up the memory of his wounded saviour above the Estate that had never till now asked him to remember his story.

The work was dedicated on St Barnabas' Day and mass flowed naturally into a party given in thanksgiving and appreciation for all that had been done. One man said it was the first time in ten years he had been made to feel proud of anything he had done. The two characteristics of the cross were wounds and condemnation, and we discovered from the day we raised the cross that we were to be a community of walking wounded and the easily condemned. Almost all those whom Christ has drawn through his sacramental presence to touch him at St B's have suffered or are suffering some form of illness, handicap, grief or rejection.

The small congregation has trebled over the last two years, yet still only two of them are waged. No one was surprised, therefore, when we were approached out of the blue by Youth Justice and Social Services and asked if we would help with finding worthwhile community service for a group of 'young offenders' from the Estate. That first approach has led to the development of the St Barnabas Project. The congregation stretched their widow's mite to buy an old sea-freight container to serve as a club-house and home-base for 'the lads'. They began to refurbish and renovate gardens and garages of elderly residents and then moved on to a furniture turn-around scheme, renovating throwaway furniture and taking it to addresses, supplied by Social Services, of households whose needs could not be met by their over-spent statutory grants. For some of the lads, who had been in houses to remove peoples' goods, there was a kind of ritual reversal and redemption in going into a house to fill it full of good things and to be greeted with thanksgiving and blessing instead of a curse. Friends became involved, hidden talents unearthed. A lad on the project who liked to mess around on keyboards learnt to play the church organ and played at services as part of his community service sentence. The sentence is long over

but he is still our church organist and, perhaps for the first time, a highly valued member of a community that extends beyond his peer group.

In all this, the key has been the sense of the sacramental: at every stage, the communication of the gospel has been through image and sacrament, hands-on in every sense. And here we have rediscovered the resources of our past. In a post-modern world, we have started to draw more and more on pre-literate traditions. The cool, Cartesian rationalism, the 'I think therefore I am' that defines a literate man in his study, says nothing on the Estate. For us, as for our ancestors before the Enlightenment (and indeed before the Reformation), the real founding truth is not 'I think, therefore I am' or even its dwindling suburban derivative 'I shop, therefore I am', but rather 'We belong, therefore we are'.



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A few examples will show how this re-discovery of a pre-modern way of being church has worked out in practice. I had been searching in modern accounts of church life for way of communicating a catholic Gospel on an estate like ours, in vain. All the models of evangelism were from a suburban, wordy evangelical culture. The best way forward came instead from a work of history. In Eamon Duffy's wonderful book *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale University Press, 1992), there is a powerful account of the celebration of Candlemass in pre-Reformation (and, for many, pre-literate) England. His thesis is that far from being alienated by a clerical elite, there was massive lay participation in, and ownership of, the great liturgical moments of the church. Every guild and group had its own point of contact, its own lights to keep burning, its own altar to maintain, its corporate place in what happened, physically manifested, in movement, procession, the carrying and dedicating of candles, and the physical re-enactment in the drama of liturgy of key Gospel stories, in this case the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

His pre-modern Candlemass came naturally to St B's. At a special evening mass, folk came from the old people's home to represent Simeon and Anna, children came to play the parts of Mary and Joseph, the

different groups that had begun to connect and cohere with the church came bearing their own lights and candles to a Gospel procession which re-enacted the presentation and spoke vividly and without words of the unquenchable light of Christ shining out through the poor in the darkness of the Estate. Events like that cannot be replicated week by week, and they do not suddenly create the habit of church-going on a largely unchurched estate; but they are points of presence, moments for a community to glimpse what community is. And now, at St B's, these folk gatherings of our fringe groups, to mark a great feast, happen about once a quarter and always draw lapsed communicants back to the nourishing body and blood.

There is an irony that the body of Christian teaching from pre-enlightenment culture – which is in fact most directly relevant to a post-enlightenment world – is not available in any widely accessible form, but is confined to old libraries and studies or the occasional footnote in more modern books. I wrote my doctoral thesis on *The Art of Memory and the Art of Salvation in the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes and John Donne* and, far from finding that I had to shelve it as I came to minister on the Estate, I found myself drawing from it – and from the body of material I read to write it – ever more deeply. Of course, I do not make long, scholarly quotations from Andrewes in sermons or teaching at St B's, but his way of seeing, touching, handling and story-telling informs everything I do. For example, one of the great resurrection sermons is a meditation on the sign of Jonah. During this sermon, he gradually absorbs into the image (of being swallowed alive by the whale) not only the fear of death and the grave but every human sense of being trapped, being overwhelmed and lost in something vast and alien; and his use of the image suddenly made it startlingly relevant to the experiences of addiction and debt which form part of my everyday pastoral encounters. Andrewes showed me how to re-read the story, with and within the experience of my people rather than to pick it over as a post-enlightenment analyst. At St B's one summer, we made a whale and re-enacted the story as a great piece of fun story-telling with children, but pitched so that the adults caught the pattern that, even after such a swallowing, the power of resurrection can set us at liberty.

Every one of Andrewes' great festival sermons ends with dramatic, participatory re-enactment, because it finishes by pointing and inviting to the sacrament, to physical connection in a way beyond words with the Word made flesh; the body and blood. And what that sacrament of communion might really mean now, so many worlds away from the old, church controversies about 'real' versus 'symbolic' presence, was made suddenly clear at one of the half dozen

Malcolm's article continues on page 13 ...

How I wept to hear your hymns and songs

by Julie Nelson



Nicola Slee used the graphic phrase 'straddling the spheres' to describe the emotional, intellectual and spiritual gymnastics involved in seeking to hold together faith in Jesus Christ and commitment to the well-being of women in today's world'. The tensions have become focussed for me in the area of language, especially the language of hymns.

The experience, for example, of studying contemporary theology one day and singing hymns in church another became disconcerting. Augustine's words 'how I wept to hear your hymns and songs', referring to the power of hymns to affect and effect religious feeling, began to take on a rather different meaning for me. The hymns I found myself singing seemed increasingly irrelevant to, and even in conflict with, my concerns and the ways I was beginning to wish to speak to God and of God's relationship with the world.

There is now growing acceptance of hymns containing inclusive language for humans

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(encouraged by the Archbishops' Report on church music: *In Tune with Heaven*) and some of the most recent hymnals see valiant efforts to amend older hymns in this respect. The United Reformed Church's *Rejoice and Sing* has done the best work so far in this area, proving that unobtrusive, textual changes can be made without destroying poetry or meaning. Current editions of *Hymns Ancient and Modern New Standard* (1983) and *The New English Hymnal* (1986) now look dated by comparison.

However, hymns are not only about human beings but also about God. And while inclusive language for humans is gaining wider acceptance, any suggestion that we might experiment with inclusive language for God meets with immediate and powerful opposition. Yet can the two issues be kept separate?

The language we use to speak of God affects the ways we view ourselves and our relationships or seek to construct the communities in which we live, move and worship. Language for God remains exclusively male in both traditional and modern evangelical hymns, and is linked with imagery which emphasises God as almighty, transcendent and self-sufficient; it underplays the vulnerable, immanent and relational God experienced and expressed in much contemporary theology.

While asserting the metaphorical nature of all language for God, feminists and others are exploring alternative imagery which affirms the feminine as well as the masculine and seeks to transform our viewpoints. Hymnody is ideal for such exploration because of its reliance on poetry and metaphor, enabling it to nudge the boundaries and to try out new names. Brian Wren², for example, suggests to us:

*Bring many names, beautiful and good;
celebrate in parable and story,
holiness in glory,
living, loving God . . .*

*Strong Mother God, working night and day,
planning all the wonders of creation . . .
Warm Father God, hugging every child,
feeling all the strains of human living . . .
Old, aching God, grey with endless care . . .
Young, growing God, eager still to know . . .*

Janet Wootton³ draws on biblical imagery (the Psalms and Isaiah) in the following:

*Dear Mother God,
your wings are warm around us
We are enfolded in your love and care . . .
High overhead
your wingbeats call us onward.
Filled with your power
we ride the empty air . . .*

If these images are startling or shocking, it is because of their unfamiliarity: the metaphors suggesting new ways of thinking, of attempting to speak of the unspeakable, the ineffable. But here emerges another source of tension. Hymns have always functioned within the Christian church to express and articulate the experience of the whole community, binding the community together, urging it on its task of worship, proclamation and service. Hymns only 'take' when they express what the congrega-

tion wants and is able to say about itself and about God. The new metaphors and language being explored by Wren, Wootton and others will not be taken up unless they resonate with the faith experience of the users. There is a danger that such new hymns will be sung only by those who have already distanced themselves from the mainstream or have become disaffected by official Christianity and moved to the margins, to WomenChurch and other alternative groups.

I find myself again straddling the spheres, but the spheres are moving further apart. I want to sing the new hymns, to try them out, to see if they 'work' for Christians: do they help us to know and love God, to know ourselves? Do they encourage our pilgrimage, strengthen our ministry? But the congregations I work with want only the old, familiar hymns or modern, evangelical compositions which still seem to say the same things. I respect these congregations, their experience and the associations which make them favour certain hymns over others. Concern for openness, dialogue and the valuing of diversity are brought powerfully home to me. If I want them to listen to me – or to new hymns – I must listen to them.

So I find myself speaking and singing with two voices. I continue in my dialogue both with the tradition and with new insights. I listen as the tradition is challenged by feminism; and feminism tested against the tradition and experience of the living church. I pray for both to be transformed and drawn closer to the unknown reality we call God. Sometimes I feel torn apart, but I am able to survive because of times of revelation when connections appear, bridges can be constructed, reconciliation becomes a possibility. In continuing to explore words for and about God, may we create a space in which the Word can be heard anew.

¹ Nicola Slee, *Straddling the Spheres, Juggling the Words: Being a Christian Feminist*, Women in Theology, 1991.

² Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship*, SCM, 1989.

³ Janet Wootton, *In Reflecting Praise*, Stainer & Bell, 1993.



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Out of control:

Theology in a Postmodern Age

by Esther Reed



The term 'postmodern' is to be used with caution. It is somewhat faddish and has been superseded in Sunday broadsheet news-papers by speculation about a 'post-postmodern' age. Heaven help us! In what sort of age do we live? What forces are at work in western culture? Is theology immune to such forces and trends? How much notice should we take?

Consideration has to be given to possible meanings of the term 'postmodern', to discuss challenges to theology of certain contemporary trends and to suggest how we might discern and concentrate in new ways on God's reality and presence within the cultural patterns of everyday life.

Postmodernism is a name given to cultural tendencies that are characterised by change and the need to leave behind redundant and false certainties of the modern era. Broadly speaking, the certainties of rational truth, enlightenment and progress can no longer be relied upon. The modern assertion 'everything real is rational, everything rational is real' was refuted once and for all at the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Communist beliefs in proletarian democracy were dashed as workers rose up against the Party, e.g. in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Established theories of economic liberalism fell apart in the crises of 1911 and 1929.

*All about us
is a loss of confidence
in old certainties
and doubt
as to the reliability
of reason . . .*

Enlightenment values of instrumental or goal-directed reason and progress have resulted in a culture less marked by freedom than by the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy that Weber foretold. Jean-François Lyotard described in *The Postmodern Condition* the predominant feature of postmodernism as the eclipse of such 'metanarratives' of rationality and progress. By metanarrative, or master-story, is meant an account of reality that claims to explain and understand it totally. Postmodernism is an intellectual stance that chooses to abandon modern assumptions about unitary interpretations of reality. It is a stance characterised by difference, plurality and 'otherness' rather than unity, totality and sameness. Its adherents are interested less in structures and centralised authority than in the de-structuring of old orders and the weaving of new patterns

of relation that are marked by eclecticism, choice and fluidity.

Where does Christian theology stand (or fall) amidst all this change? Should we welcome the collapse of modern confidence in human ability, with its dangerous implications that, through the exercise of reason, humankind shares in the same perfections and substance as God? Should we swim against the tide and hold on to emancipatory, fraternal and democratic values associated with Enlightenment reason? Such questions are not easy and carry enormous implications for how we do theology today.

All about us is a loss of confidence in old certainties and doubt as to the reliability of reason. Established centres of authority have been dislodged or decentred. Plurality and diversity slide easily towards fragmentation and confusion. Amongst some Christian people is a feeling of powerlessness, closure and 'blankness' (these descriptive terms are used by Michael Welker in *God the Spirit*; his book is richly rewarding and I recommend it strongly). Old definitions of faith seem dry, dusty and unable to offer the spiritual refreshment we all need. The postmodern theologian Mark C. Taylor writes of wandering aimlessly without any map or compass with which to find a way ahead. In an essay, entitled *Reframing Postmodernisms*, he speaks of religion being in the desert or place of absence. In the desert or wilderness, the only appropriate actions are those of waiting, wandering and removing from our theologies all inessential baggage. He plays on the word 'desert' and 'dessert' to suggest that contemporary, theological experiences of barrenness are deserved because of theological complicity with false gods of modernity.

But wait! Before succumbing to the disillusionment that pervades much of our culture today, let's think again. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned from mistakes in the modern period. Perhaps new opportunities are emerging in which to look and listen afresh for the movings of God's Spirit. As Michael Welker writes: 'In constantly new ways, the Spirit leads people into communion with the resurrected *Crucified One* . . . The Spirit awakens enjoyment of the force fields of faith, hope and love

which, in the midst of a fleshliness and a world assailed and marked by sin and death, make it possible to recognise and to attest to God's presence and God's will in constantly new ways.'

Welker's repetition of, and insistence upon, the faithful and unchanging newness of God's Spirit is testimony to the presence of hope in a changing, troubled world. There is no opt-out clause for theologians because no place, theory or problem lies outside the reach of God's mercy.

As Bonhoeffer believed, worldliness does not separate us from but unites us to Christ,

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who stands wholly in this world. Prayer throws believers into contemporaneity at the very same moment that we contemplate the eternal. This does not mean that the task is easy. To the contrary, it involves trying to understand present day trends, as well as identifying past shortfalls in the theological endeavour.

The following are a few questions and suggestions that might prove useful along the way:

First, have we learned that God will not be squashed into humanly-constructed systems and theories? Systematised thinking of the worst sort can falsely reduce God to a factor within a human schema.

Second, have we learned that God might have new patterns of service which will not be associated with structures of hierarchical domination that confuse the proper authority of service with that of aggrandisement? The Spirit of God might have new patterns for our collaborative church life together that, as yet, are unforeseen by us.

Third, are we holding on to ideas that render God absent from our world in some distant and inaccessible realm beyond the limits of reason? Such ideas will render us blinkered and insensitive to the invigorating presence of God's Spirit in the world.

Fourth, do we have a reduced doctrine of Jesus Christ as an ideal of humanity? If so, let us orient our lives to God again in worship, where it is possible to perceive the identity of Jesus without distortion.

Fifth, are we tempted to think that knowledge of God is something fixed and static and are thus resistant to diversity and difference with our ecclesial and spiritual lives? The Holy Spirit of God is the giver of diverse gifts that nourish and enrich all God's people in times and places that we might least expect.

Sixth, is our church life hindered by the paralysis that besets those who fear what the future has in store? God's Holy Spirit brought new beginnings to the Israelite people and remains the Spirit of Life today. Seventh, does our church life pander to modern notions of individual piety that divert us from the work of seeking justice and peace in our world. If so, let us open our ears to the prophetic once again.

These considerations combine to imply that a critique of Christian theology in the modern age, far from being an optional extra or risqué distraction, is indispensable to its health today. It might involve times of weeping and repentance. However, some aspects of the ethos of the 'postmodern age' might positively assist us in attaining the clarity that is necessary for constructively-critical work. In particular, we are reminded that theologians (i.e. those who pray to, talk about and worship God) cannot seek to control God (whom we worship) by any humanly-constructed means. The post-modern theologian cannot confuse human control with confidence in the promised reign of God. We cannot restrict God's Spirit to any working hypothesis, structure of authority, ideology, ideal or economic force.

The Holy Spirit of God is, as Michael Welker says, 'a force-field of divine power and presence' that blows our human attempts at control away as it wills. Theology in a 'postmodern age' might be less predictable than might be desired for comfort. Old, rational certainties will perhaps be taken away. One thing, however, remains certain. God's grace provides for new possibilities of blessing in every time and place. In this do we trust.



Dr Esther Reed lectures in theology at Exeter University and is a member of the Faith & Order Committee of the Methodist Church. She has also just published: *A Theological Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*.

franciscan database

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Tristram SSF

Editor and Subscriptions Secretary

Gospel and culture

by Brother Samuel SSF

'Life is not a lottery . . .' began one of the group statements made at the recent Gospel and Culture Conference for SSF brothers and sisters at Hilfield. The Lottery was much on our mind at the time as there had been a 'double roll-over' jackpot the previous week worth £42 million.

The Lottery, it seemed, was a symptom, an icon of what is happening in our late twentieth-century western society, and part of the aim of coming together was to try and understand the culture of this society.

Of course, it is easy for us to be sniffy about the National Lottery, to tut-tut about the dangers of gambling and to warn about Mystic Meg; in our three days, we attempted to look deeper. The first part was entitled *The Truth of Reality* and involved reflecting on our own experience of life and society. Newspapers and magazines can be a useful mirror of people's concerns and aspirations and we spent an entertaining evening making collages, building up pictures of the world as we saw it from cut-out adverts, pictures and headlines. The exercise itself was perhaps an expression of contemporary culture: visual, playful, incorporating diversity and change. In subsequent discussion, we recognised some of the negative effects: isolation, insecurity and cynicism.

The second part, *The Truth of Faith*, focussed on the questions 'Where is God in all this?'; 'How can God be known and experienced in our culture?' We shared a deep conviction that God is to be found in uncertainty as much as in certainty, in change as well as stability, and is often revealed through the unpredictable and the absurd.

This is a God of extravagant generosity and infinite ingenuity, always participating and improvising in order to bring creation to fulfilment. At the same time, the God of

Jesus Christ is God in the gutter, God on the margins, alongside us in tragedy and suffering, bearing the cost of the freedom of choice to which we so much aspire.

We looked at passages in Scripture which question our assumptions about God being found principally in order, givenness and control. We were affirmed in our conviction that there is indeed Good News which can be articulated in the language of our culture and yet which also challenges it.

In *The Truth of Action*, we moved on to address the issue of our response as Franciscans. We saw that Francis' relationship with the God of generosity and graciousness in creation and in redemption, which led him to address all people and things as brother/sister, can speak powerfully to the sense of isolation, insecurity and cynicism which so many in our society are experiencing. We recognised that Francis' intimate awareness of God in all things can be a way for the many who are longing for a living spirituality; and again, we found that the poverty and foolishness of Francis can witness to the presence and power of God for those who are denied the 'blessings' of choice and competition.

We believe that we have particular gifts to share – from our Franciscan roots and from the way of life that has grown and developed in SSF over the past 75 years – gifts of community, of marginality and of simplicity to name just a few. These both challenge yet are strangely in tune with much in our culture and are precious resources for the task of mission in God's world.

Where is biblical criticism going?

by James Carleton Paget



Standard commentaries on biblical books use what is termed the historical-critical method. In the introduction to such a commentary, the writer usually seeks to answer a relatively standard set of questions: the identity of the author, if that can be known (and in most cases in the Bible it cannot); the date when the work was written; the historical context out of which the book and its author emerged; the purpose for which the book was written; and perhaps the sources that were available to the author. If the book purports to tell a story, then the historical reliability of these accounts will be discussed.

Other subjects which may come in for discussion might be the text of the book, the literary integrity of the book (is there a reason to believe that the book as we have it in our Bible has been added to, or subtracted from, by subsequent editors?) and perhaps the style or language of the author. Drawing on the conclusions reached in the introduction, the commentator will then proceed to a verse-by-verse discussion of the text in question, paying close attention to linguistic details and seeking as far as possible to understand the book as it was intended to be understood by the author.

This method of interpretation has its origins in the Germany of the middle part of the eighteenth century, and was originally conceived of in an intellectual climate that found itself ill-at-ease with the prevailing religious culture. Its aim was to read the Bible in a critical way distilling fact from fiction and, in so doing, disproving the religious givens of the time.

A belief in the possibility of attaining objectivity – such a concern of the historical critics – has now all but disappeared.

In such an approach, particular stress was placed upon the need for objectivity over against judgements that were apparently based upon faith. In striving after such objectivity, a knowledge of the cultures and contexts out of which the biblical books emerged became important and, in particular, archaeology began to make a contribution to biblical studies. Judgements about the historical reliability, or lack of it, of the Bible varied from scholar to scholar but scepticism, particularly with regard to any account of miracle or other forms of

divine intervention, was prevalent.

Later on, as methods of historical criticism developed, scholars became more and more interested in reading the books of the Bible with regard to the *intentions* of the authors who wrote them. These authors, it was recognised, were theologians with quite specific views which they wished to propagate by means of their writing. In this view of the biblical author as a knowing editor or redactor (a German term meaning editor), attempts were made to determine the intentions of the author and to illuminate the context out of which he emerged. In this vein, particular importance was attached to discovering the sources that were available to the author in order to show how he or she had used such sources. Sometimes determining these sources was easy (so the author of 1 & 2 Chronicles has used 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings to write his history; and Matthew and Luke, it is generally thought, had Mark as a source), but sometimes the source was not itself available in its original, written form and had to be constructed from reading the text itself. So, for instance, it is generally agreed that Matthew and Luke had independent access to a separate source Q, but we do not in fact possess a copy of this mooted source!

This, then, is the historical-critical method. It can either seek to interpret the Bible with a view to gleaning information from it about apparently historical events (e.g. the Exodus) or figures (Moses, Jesus) with special reference to the historical context out of which these events or figures emerged. Or it can seek to read the Bible with a view to determining the intentions of the authors of its individual books. Such a method, in whichever form it appears, stresses the historical nature of biblical books and seeks to read them in such a way as to do justice to this 'historicality', this past-ness.

But in more recent times, scholars have begun to question the legitimacy of the historical-critical method. In part, this has arisen out of shifts in the intellectual world at

large. A belief in the possibility of attaining objectivity – such a concern of the historical critics – has now all but disappeared. We live in one world with its own pre-suppositions and prejudices and so can no longer think of our minds as antiseptic tanks, which can objectively distinguish truth from fancy. This is particularly so when we are dealing with texts from a period of history very different from our own. This espousal of relativism can be extreme or moderate, but it is a view that has served to shatter the quest for objective knowledge, whether historical or otherwise.

The decline in belief in the attainment of objectivity, and the movement to an emphasis upon the rôle of the prejudiced interpreter and his or her world in the process of interpretation, has led biblical critics in a number of directions. Some have wished to embark upon more literary interpretations of the text, which show how the narrative of a particular story flows, without reference to the historical referent of the text.

The realisation that there is no such thing as an innocent reading has led some scholars to argue that historical critics and others have often read the Bible in such a way as to denude it of its politically radical message.

So, for instance, the Gospels are read with an awareness of the fact that they are telling a story, with the concomitant implications of such a view. Sometimes, those who espouse such an approach to the Bible argue that their way of reading the text has more in common with the methods employed by our ancient and medieval forebears, for their interests lay principally in seeing the Bible as the story of God's dealings with the world, without reference to the historical validity of that story. More radical literary readings have also been employed, most notably structuralism and deconstruction.

The movement away from an interest in establishing the intention of the author to an awareness of the necessary and unavoidable rôle of the reader, has led in other directions as well. Some of these have been notably political. The realisation that there is no such thing as an innocent reading has led some scholars to argue that historical critics and others have often read the Bible in such a way as to denude it of its politically radical message. These liberation theologians who seek to rescue the Bible for the oppressed (the poor, women, blacks, etc.), have had a considerable influence. In part, their own

Minister's Letter

Sister Teresa,
Minister General of the First Order Sisters,
shares part of her address
to the First Order Chapters
at Hilfield Friary, August 1996



In the Incarnation, Francis saw God present, totally present in the world that God had made. All creation, every single bit of it, spoke to him of the Creator who was to be worshipped in and through it. In his deepest self, he was aware of a world shot through with the glory and the presence of God. He was not a pantheist – he did not worship nature – he worshipped God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. He understood, more clearly than most, that the whole of creation is to be brought back into the reconciling love of Jesus Christ, back into the intimacy that it had with God when it was first made, and that human beings have a particular responsibility in this.

We are all too familiar, terrifyingly familiar, with the abuse of creation – exploitation, pollution of air and water, the destruction of the ozone layer, rape of the earth, burning of rain forests, the exploitation of the seas, dragnet fishing – the destruction is endless. What we are offered by God is the use, the glory, the mystery of creation as a powerful and ever-present means of grace which will carry us to the very heart of God.

Francis's involvement with God's gift of

creation, however, was not primarily directed to the world of nature, but to the world of *people*. His own inner journey, his courage in facing the depths of his own being, in company with God, led him to overcome his own revulsion and embrace the leper – and so began another journey that ceased only at his death: the journey of identification with the poor, the outcast, the disadvantaged and the down-trodden people around him. As Murray Bodo expresses it: 'Francis became a liberator of cave-dwellers all over the world by shining the Resurrected Christ into dark caves for all time to come.'

Francis has left us something positive to say to our world, something positive to do in our society and something positive to be in our lives. And it is primarily to do with those who live in dark caves, whether of their own or someone else's or society's making.

The human problems which surround us today are the same in essence as those which surrounded Francis, though the stage on which they are enacted may be very different. It is tempting for us to assume that it was somehow easier for Francis to

take his stand against the injustices of his world than it is for us in our world today, and we become paralysed by the enormity of the task. The truth is: we should be encouraged. Our generation has seen many sweeping changes brought about by changing attitudes in public opinion and, in this age of communication, we have many instances of what a single individual can do or a group achieve.

We have an opportunity to look again at our responsibility as Franciscans nearing the twenty-first century and maybe we need, both as individuals and as a Society, to listen more deeply to our consciences.

Teresa C.S.F.

views emerge from a prior decision about the nature of social justice and they seek to read the Bible from that perspective. But not all liberation theologians indulge in a type of interpretative relativism. Some of these scholars attempt to justify their conclusions by reference to the old historical methods – the historical Jesus was a socialist, and so on.

Liberation theology takes an essentially positive attitude to the Bible and its contents. But other forms of reading do not. In these, the Bible is simply exposed as a text beyond redemption in which slavery, patriarchy and

other forms of oppression are endorsed. Biblical criticism becomes nothing but an exposé of these facts about the biblical world.

The presuppositions, upon which the standard commentary with which we began was based, no longer dominate. Biblical studies has entered a brave new world where the historical critic with a basket full of well-tried and carefully-honed methods is beginning to look like a marginal figure. Historical critics may well complain that their old methods can at least be judged by clearly determined criteria and aims, while the newer methods, literary, deconstructionist, etc., with their apparent endorsement of the postmodern agenda, have set up game parks which, like lacrosse pitches, appear to have no boundaries. But their opponents reply by dismissing the historical critic's confidence in his or her criteria (and sometimes pointing to the numerous different historical interpretations of passage/books, etc. in the Bible) and by asserting that what he or she, the postmodern, does is, in the end, a more realistic and infinitely more playful and productive way of reading the Bible.

In this article, I have attempted to show how Biblical criticism is polarising into two camps. Such a view is by no means comprehensive and one could, for instance, mention attempts to revive a form of biblical theology, something that had its heyday in the 1950's and 60's but is now 'coming

back' in certain quarters. In this form of criticism, a theological reading of the Bible is openly espoused. But, as far as the academy goes, I see the main fault lines as running between the historical critics and the postmoderns of whatever kind. It seems at present that a fruitful relationship does not exist between these two perspectives and that their exponents will simply ignore each other. However, the creation of some sort of a symbiosis is perhaps the challenge for both contemporary and future generations of biblical critics.

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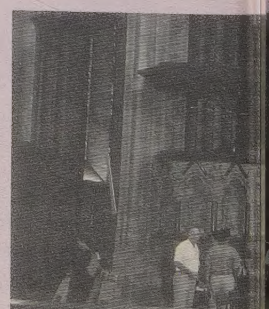
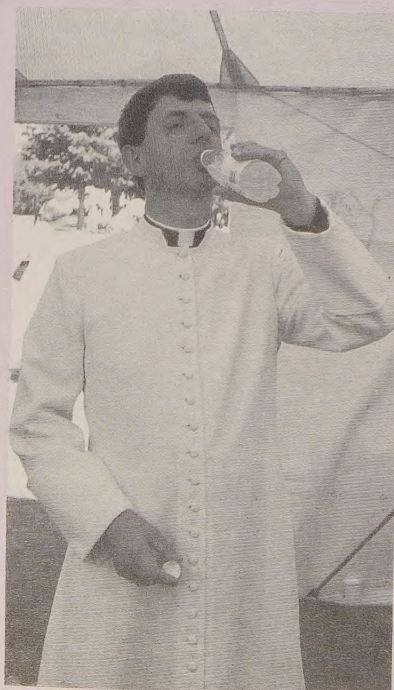
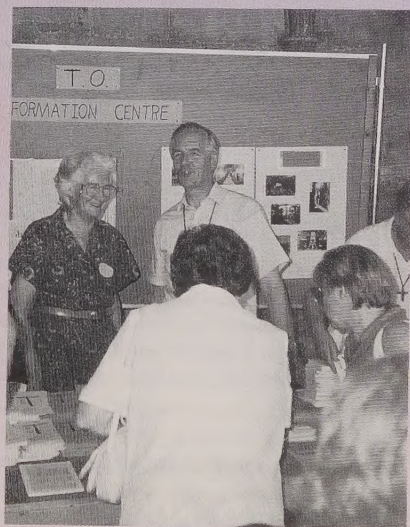
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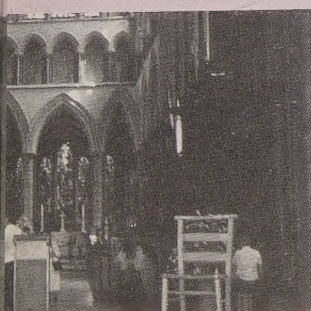
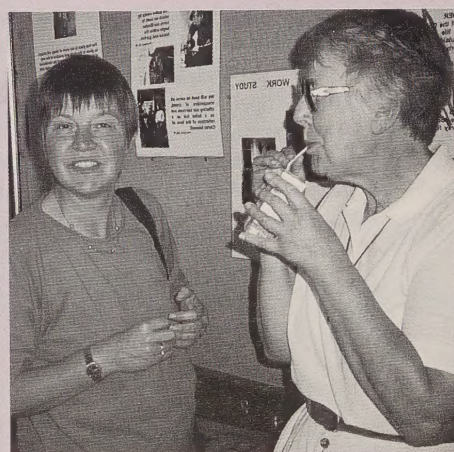
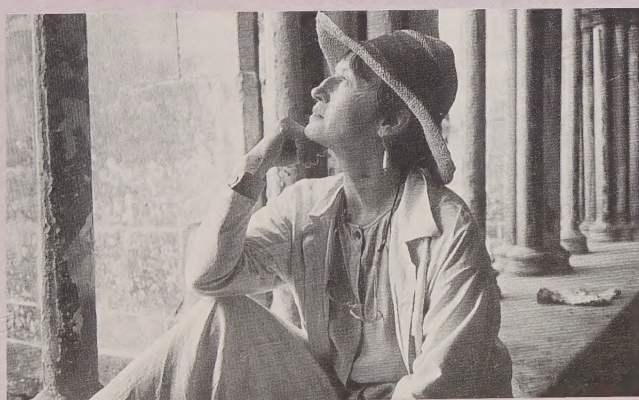
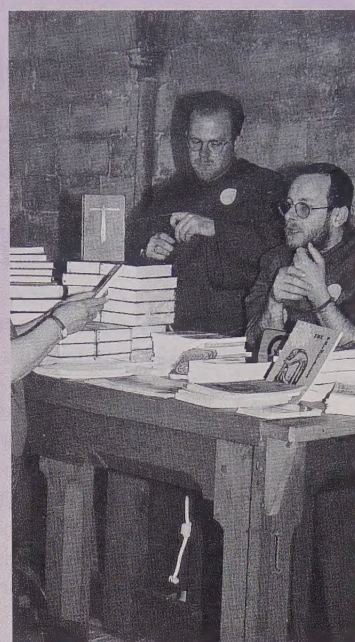
Third Order Diamond Jubilee

20 June



Day, Salisbury Cathedral

996



Community Routes

◆◆ New Minister Provincial CSF

Sister **Joyce** has been elected Minister of the First Order Sisters of the European Province. She took office immediately after the count of votes on 30 July.

Joyce joined the community in 1970 and has been in profession for 23 years. She has lived in several houses in this Province and in the American Province and was, until her election, General Secretary and Novice Guardian. She at present lives in the Brixton house and expects to remain there for the time being.

The election came about because **Nan**, who was coming to the end of her term of office, resigned so as to allow the new Minister to attend the triennial First Order Chapter at Hilfield at the end of August. Subsequent to that, Nan's mother Betty became seriously ill in South Africa and Nan flew home to be with her. Your prayers are asked for Betty Stubbings and all her family.

◆◆ Keble Calls

After recent discussions about how we might begin to bring Franciscan ideas to a younger audience, four brothers and sisters will be spending time in Keble College, Oxford, in the autumn. They hope to join in with College societies, share meals with the students and get an informal taste of university life, together with the framework of worship in the college chapel. The event will begin with an open Eucharist in the chapel at 5.30 pm on Sunday **27 October**. Sister **Pat** will preach on *Celebrating Francis* and there will be drinks afterwards. We hope that our friends in the area will come and lend their support on this occasion.



Sister Joyce, new Minister Provincial CSF

◆◆ Alternative Service

Tristram has been appointed a member of the Church of England Liturgical Commission for a period of five years. He first joined that august body in 1992, just before the publication of *Celebrating Common Prayer*, which he edited. The Commission will be bringing revisions of most of the contents of *The Alternative Service Book 1980* to the General Synod in the coming five years, so this will be a busy period, and not all contributions made by the Commission to Synod are received with overwhelming gratitude. We wish him well.

◆◆ Being Brothers

Brother Anselm writes:

Just for once, the weather helped. The two full days of the annual **SSF Provincial General Chapter** meeting at Hilfield of the

life professed brothers were hot and sunny. For those who visited **Vincent's** 'secret garden', there was a wealth of colour: magnolias, rhododendrons, azaleas and more, to test the spelling and catch the eye. However, the purpose of it all was to get the brothers in one place - and here was another surprise: since last year the builders have once again been busy, this time with the refurbishment of the 'recreation room', on the other side of the courtyard to St Francis Chapel. The stage and the ceiling are no more, leaving a large, airy, light hall in which to meet.

The two days gave us opportunities for listening, discussing, being open with each other. Our agenda included the opening and closing of houses, the consideration of the provincial budget and pensions. **Damian**, our Minister, inspired us; **Angelo**, who gave the first Franciscan lecture, informed and stimulated us; with no outside facilitator, we shared the chair widely. We departed with hope for our Province of SSF, confident that we have found a way forward in strengthening bonds between us in our very dispersed way of life, yet wondering whether we have to learn how to share *disagreements* openly.

◆◆ Well Protected

At the end of October, our Bishop Protector **Philip Goodrich** retires: primarily as Bishop of Worcester but also, more poignantly for SSF, as our Protector in this Province and as Protector General of the Society world-wide. Bishop Philip has been caring for the



Tristram SSF

Gathering for the annual Provincial General Chapter at Hilfield, June 1996

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Glasshampton brothers since he became their diocesan bishop but he formally took over protecting us all in 1990.

It proved a wise appointment, and the relationship has been a good and fruitful one. He was meticulous in his being there for us when needed, whether it was presiding gloriously at ceremonies of life profession or sitting through dull meetings about community finance. His presence, together with that of Margaret his wife, will be much missed.

At the Pentecost meetings of Chapter, the First Order Brothers and Sisters elected the Bishop of Winchester, **Michael Scott-Joynt** as the new Provincial Bishop Protector, with effect from 1 November. His wife Lou is a member of the Third Order and they both have known SSF for many years. We look forward to receiving his ministry and protection!

◆◆ PNG Volunteer?

Hugh, in Papua New Guinea, is looking for a suitable lay volunteer to assist, from early 1997, with the education programme at Haruro Friary. The expenses of getting there are usually raised by the volunteer, but SSF may be able to assist. Anyone who qualifies and who is interested should get in touch with **Damian** at Scunthorpe.

◆◆ Pilgrims

Sister Moyra, who represents C/SSF with the Pilgrims of St Francis, writes:

The Pilgrims of Saint Francis are a group who appear regularly on the intercession list but who, on the whole, are not well known. They are an international, ecumenical movement which began over 25 years ago in this country. Being on pilgrimage is very much about life on the move, being open to the possibilities that brings. It's about building community with the group of pilgrims you happen to find yourself with on any pilgrim event and, in the spirit of St Francis, leading a simple lifestyle, carrying what possessions you need with you in your rucksack. A typical day's pilgrimage will include worship, discussion, cooking and eating together, singing, and a great deal of humour.

◆◆ Divine Compassion

On Friday 14 June, the feast of the Divine Compassion of our Lord, the new **parish of the Divine Compassion, Plaistow** was inaugurated. Ken Leech preached, and spoke of his early days with SSF in Cable Street; Roger Sainsbury, the Bishop of Barking presided; he is an old friend of the community from his days at the Mayflower Centre in Canning Town. The new Team Rector, Carl Turner, organised a service to be

beheld: with red, heart-shaped balloons festooning the church, a glorious range of music and musicians and, most important of all, the people of the parish completely involved, made for what Bishop Roger described as an 'Acts of the Apostles' occasion. Even the Secretary of the Liturgical Commission was invited (and turned up!), just to let him see how things are done so well in London's East End.

Meanwhile, prior to this Service, a simple Act of Covenant was signed in the House chapel between SSF and **Helping Hands**, a caring charity brought into being by SSF in 1983. With so few brothers at Balaam Street, the premises are mainly used as a centre for this work.

◆◆ A Question of Degree

Silas has successfully completed his degree in theology at Birmingham University, receiving not only First class honours, but also a distinction on every paper. He also won the senior prize for his dissertation. After such a stunning set of results, **Silas** now hopes to study for a doctorate.

◆◆ Opportunity

Jackie writes about the work of Yeovil Opportunity Group, where she is a volunteer two mornings a week:

This charity aims to provide support for children with special needs and their families. Children from a few months old to school age spend time at the Centre one or more mornings a week, where the aim is to help them to have more confidence in themselves; to begin to play with others; learn to relate to other adults; develop existing skills and learn others; develop communication and language skills; have lots of fun with a wide variety of materials; and learn independence ready for school.

There is a large, bright and airy playroom with a wide variety of toys, books, specialised equipment and play materials. In smaller rooms the children can use a computer, and a variety of musical instruments; and there are specialised areas, for physiotherapy and speech therapy. My favourite is the sensory room, which has a water bed and lots of relaxing equipment. There is also an outside grassed play area, with swings, slides, cars, bikes and sand pit. The first session is structured play, then outside to let off steam, before a singing session to prepare the children for home. There are permanent trained staff, but the group relies on many volunteers to give a ratio of 1 adult for 2 children. Other specialist staff visit on a regular basis.

It is an opportunity for all the children, who have delayed learning for some reason e.g. autism, cerebral palsy, Downs syndrome, or genetic problems. But is also a wonderful opportunity for me, to use present skills with children, learn new ones, and get lots of hugs.

◆◆ RIP

Sister Elizabeth CSF writes:

"**Dorothy Elliston** died on 21 June, aged ninety six. She came to CSF on March 19th 1924 aged twenty five. Employed as a maid, she never wanted to be a Sister, but eventually became a Tertiary Regular. Right up to the 1960's she still wore a cord and scapular under her dress, and kept a stiff rule of life. At Dalston, she was the laundress, though she loved gardening, so the move to Compton 'enlarged her borders' considerably. Loving children, she taught in Sunday School at St Peter's, De Beauvoir Square in Dalston, and then in South Petherton. Determination, accompanied by a deep faith, kept her virtually independent until recently."

Winnie Junge also died in the FMM sisters nursing home in Plaistow the



Sister Moyra's life profession, being received by Bishop Philip of Worcester

following day; she first became a member of the congregation at St Philip's Plaistow in 1908!

May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

◆◆ Roundup

Moyra made her profession in life vows at Compton on 12 July . . . four men are aspiring to join SSF and have been invited to test their vocation, beginning at Hilfield on October 1st.

Austin has been appointed Guardian of Glasshampton.

David Francis was ordained deacon on 29 June in St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh and will be attached to the parish of St Ninian Comely Bank in the city . . . Alan expects to be ordained deacon at All Saints' Church, Gosforth, on 29 September . . . **Hugo** has received a positive recommendation for training for ordination to the priesthood and expects to begin such in the autumn, with the West Midlands Ministerial Training Course.

Roger Alexander is now working as the parish priest in Chipinge, a large town in Manicaland Diocese, Zimbabwe . . . **Rose** and **Beverley** move to Newcastle-under-Lyme, **Felicity** and **Rowan Clare** move to Brixton and **Chris** moves to Stepney, all in September . . . **Fay** returns to New Zealand in September after two years in the UK.

Angela and **Jacqueline** were both released from their membership of the First Order and have been secularised . . . **Bruce** has withdrawn from the noviciate at Hilfield.



Proximate pessimist, ultimate optimist

by Michael Saward

Canon Saward, well known for his hymns and life as a Canon of Saint Paul's Cathedral, contributes a personal review of the theological developments over the last thirty years of various groups in contemporary English Anglicanism.

So how does theology look these days to one from the evangelical tradition of the Church? One answer to that might be: 'much as usual'. The Catholics are predictably Catholic, the Liberals predictably Liberal and the Evangelicals predictably Evangelical. Three Parties in one Bod. Nothing changes here. But that won't really do. Lots of things have changed.

Take first the relative balances. Within the Church of England, in the forty years since I was ordained, a vast re-shaping has been going on. When I was a theological student, the old liberal attitude to Scripture, grounded in the nineteenth-century Tübingen tradition, was locking its horns with the 'Biblical Theology' Movement. Bultmann and Barth were in conflict.

On the fringes of all this was a nascent group of Evangelical scholars launching a new era of conservative, but not fundamentalistic, theology. They were

scorned by some, misunderstood by many, but gaining in confidence throughout the Sixties and Seventies.

Faced with the challenge of the Radicalism of the Sixties, they stood and did battle. They watched their young men gain ground in university theology faculties and, in due course, occupy chairs. As they did so, they themselves threw over the old rigidities of the ghetto into which their fathers had retreated.

To the surprise of many, the Catholic movement showed signs of theological tension and, eventually of fragmentation. One group became increasingly biblical in its rooting, disenchanted with the kind of Liberal Catholicism which had so dominated since the days of Charles Gore.

Even so, their biblical rooting did not extend to ministry and sacraments.

And then there were those who outdid the Sixties Radicals and lost all touch with

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Christian orthodoxy. Few in number, they have increasingly ditched God altogether in any recognisably Christian sense while, it seems, feeling no problem about taking the Church of England's stipends, vicarages and pensions.

Numerically the Liberals declined, as did the Catholics, in regard to those training for ordination. The Evangelicals mushroomed, providing six times as many ordinands as in the Fifties. As they did so, they began to disintegrate. Some returned to fundamentalism, some blended it with charismatic beliefs, a small number conceived its doctrine in rigorist and neo-Puritan terms, while the mainstream held fast.

In one sense, many of these trends were no more than continuing theological infighting among clergymen. But behind them all was a growing gulf between those who still believed in some kind of God, of a vaguely Christian kind, and the neo-paganism of New Age fashions and fads. Even further away were those who, under the umbrella of Postmodernism, the bastard child of Existentialism, denied any kind of absolute meaning, absolute truth, absolute morality, absolute anything. The wilder and more improbable the '-ism', the more attractive it became to the media and the fashion mongers.

Such a rejection of meaning, truth and morality has gone hand-in-hand with every kind of inclusivism in society at large. Your truth, my truth, his truth, and her truth, means, eventually, everybody's truth which ends up logically as nobody's truth. So anything goes. What began as a noble concept of the Four Freedoms has now reached a whole succession of anarchies out of which is inevitably spawned a series of mutually colliding fundamentalisms. Immerse mankind in conceptual cloud and they come out screaming for total certainty.

How then will Anglican Christians emerge from this era?

I'm no prophet. I believe in a God who is purposeful for this people and yet who, within that ultimate purpose, permits all manner of folly to exist. The world seems, in so many ways, to be going to hell in a handcart but, with William Temple, I am 'a proximate pessimist and an ultimate optimist'.

On one thing only will I put my shirt. A covenant-keeping God will always, through his Spirit, honour the mighty words, mighty deeds and mighty acts of his Son, Jesus Christ. The gates of hell will not prevail. Truth will triumph. And the core of that truth is to be found in the Holy Scriptures, lived out in the fellowship of a holy people.

Trends come and trends go but 'the word of the Lord endureth for ever.'



Canon Michael Saward is Canon Residentiary and Treasurer of St Paul's Cathedral.

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Theme Prayer

**Lord,
let me seek you
by desiring you
and desire you
by seeking you;
let me find you
by loving you
and love you
by finding you.**

From St Anselm's Proslogion

*Continuing Malcolm Guite's article from
page two . . .*

funerals of AIDS victims at which I have so far assisted.

The HIV community here is very close and show tremendous solidarity, especially and very palpably at funerals. I had experienced this twice at funerals I had taken, sharing hopes and fears at the wake afterwards with the same group, gathered in the drug-dealing pub which was at once the focus of their community and its most palpable physical and spiritual enemy. On a third occasion, I was invited to take part at a funeral being held in the Roman Catholic Church, which was celebrated as a funeral mass. Hearing the words 'this is my blood' in that context suddenly made abundantly clear Christ's intimate point of contact with this group for whom He died. In some sense, the shared needle — which was at the heart of their shared wound, and yet also symbolised their shared community — had been for them a kind of home-made communion, able to be touched and redeemed only by a communion as intimate. And it will be redeemed by One who was prepared to share blood that communicates Life and not Death. When they are ready, Christ will meet this community, not through the Church's calling to individuals to come apart and save their souls, nor by persuading any one member of that community to an intellectual assent to the creed, but Christ will meet them on the day that one of the 'wakes' we hold in that pub becomes first an *agape* and then, God willing, in bread broken and wine poured, there where the drugs are dealt and nowhere else, a communion in his body and blood.

These have been anecdotes, hints and guesses but, as they accumulate and as the connected stories of the walking wounded of St B's begin to unfold, I get the sense that we are being shown not a new theology but a very old one, not a new *ism* but an ancient way of unbroken incarnation, physical presence and the wordless touch of a wounded healer.

Book Reviews

Brother Reginald Box SSF

Make Music to Our God

How we sing the Psalms

SPCK (Alcuin Club Collection 74),

1996, £15.99

The Anglican tradition of the recitation of the psalms – said or sung by a single voice or a small group at the daily office, or as part of the Anglican version of the sung office on Sunday at the main service, or in the variety of ways in which the psalms are used during the celebration of the Eucharist – is the distinctive feature of our common life. Because the psalms have a part in public worship in a way unparalleled in other communions (until recently) there is a wide variety of musical styles, many of which spring from the way in which Coverdale's translation has become part of the *lingua franca* of the Church of England, and thence the Anglican Communion.

Brother Reginald's book on the singing of the psalms originated as a thesis for a Lambeth Diploma, but it is no mere dissertation: it is a scholarly work of analysis and reference. It is an exploration of the huge variety of ways in which the psalms can and have been used to enrich worship, with an analysis of the virtues of each approach.

Reginald compares and contrasts different translations and different styles of musical setting: Gregorian Chant and metrical psalmody find their place alongside the tradition of Anglican Chant. Words and rhythms of the different translations are analysed, as are the meaning and purpose of different arrangements of saying the Psalter, from Cranmer's post-Benedictine tradition to the seasonal, thematic versions presented in *Celebrating Common Prayer* and *The Daily Office SSF*.

What is particularly important is the way in which Reginald moves from a brief, though comprehensive, history of the psalms in worship into the variety of styles associated with singing them, setting each in its historical context but treating each as a part of a living tradition. So his book is full of helpful musical examples and moves into considering different ways in which psalms might be sung or recited in a simpler mode today, commenting on the continuing tradition of metrical psalmody, where he makes a plea for more polished verse than has been characteristic either in historical or in contemporary settings; and in the use of responsorial psalmody, the restoration of which has done so much to encourage congregational participation, with choir and congregation each allotted distinct and complementary rôles; and new methods of chanting.

Throughout the book, the author blends a critical awareness with practical awareness: this is its strength, and anyone who is

interested in not only understanding how the tradition of psalm singing has developed but in investigating and exploring appropriate methods for the Church at worship today, will benefit from reading this well-crafted piece.

✠ **David Stancliffe**

The Rt Revd David Stancliffe is Bishop of Salisbury and Chairman of the Liturgical Commission.

Editors: Elizabeth Roberts & Ann Shukman

Christianity for the Twenty-first Century

The Life and Work of Alexander Men

SCM Press, 1996, £12.95

Alexander Men is, by any standards, one of the most remarkable priests to emerge from the modern Russian Orthodox Church. Assassinated in 1990, his writings have assumed an apologetic resonance that has the potential to characterise a new genre of Christian discourse for the next millennium. As such, his importance cannot be overstated. In his life, Men was known as a gifted theologian, spiritual guide and priest. His work displays an extraordinary openness to other faiths and insights – the very flowering of Rahnerian theology and post-Vatican II thinking, with its call to deep and empathetic dialogue with traditions beyond the borders of orthodox faith. At the same time, he also opposes totalitarianism and fundamentalisms as the forces that oppress freedom of political and religious expression.

The book is an anthology that divides Men's work into three distinct categories: intellectual problems confronting Christians today, Russian religion today and, finally, Christianity in the future. The editors have done a more than commendable job in providing the reader who is new to Men's work with a single volume that illustrates his depth and diversity. There is also a biographical introduction and two brief appraisals of his life by Richard Harries and Jean Marie Lustiger. It is difficult to select highlights from an anthology, but a few personal choices will give an indication of what is on offer.

For example, in *Religion, Knowledge of God and the Problem of Evil* (Cap 2), Men talks about faith not being 'an escape from life . . . it is a force binding worlds together, a bridge . . .' The shadow of Marx is never far away in Men's writing and here Men is rejecting the notion of religion being an opiate. Like George Eliot's Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, there is a value in staying with the pain rather than fleeing from it, which brings its own rewards. These ideas, first recorded in *Istoki Religii* (*The Sources of Religion*) in 1970, were later to find fuller expression in *Magizm i edinobozhie* (*Magism and Monotheism*, 1971) and as a critique of the personality cults in secular states ('emperor worship').

The *Credo for Today's Christian* is Men at his most systematic, where apologetic style clearly marks out a strong liberal ecclesiology

that can still identify itself as coherent and Christian. This prepares the ground for his belief in the 'Universal Vision' which he outlines, which is a plea for the centrality and critical empathy of the Christian faith in relation to other religions. Men is a pilgrim: he does not possess truth but is possessed by it, and he invites his readers to be taken up by the same grace that lives in him. As such, it is a strong, appealing faith, yet neither too dogmatic or contrary. Thus, we read that 'Jesus did not begin to preach Christianity as some kind of intellectual system . . . what he proclaimed to the people he called *besorah*, the 'glad tidings'. And that the essence of Christianity is 'God-mankind, the joining of the finite and temporal human spirit with the eternal Divinity . . . it is the sanctification of the flesh . . . the sanctification of the world.'

This book is an excellent introduction to Men's thought and work. It represents a significant contribution to the debate over how Christianity is to be in the next millennium. Men's intelligent and systematic apologetics should really begin to get a wider audience as a result of this book, which will in turn enrich theology, the church and society. Let us hope so, at least.

Martyn Percy

Dr Martyn Percy is Chaplain and Director of Theological and Religious Studies at Christ's College, Cambridge.

Richard Harries

Art and the Beauty of God

Mowbray, 1994, £10.99

'Your eyes shall see the King in his Beauty': the exciting thing about this book by the Bishop of Oxford is the way it helps to give substance to that prophecy of Isaiah. It is in no sense an autobiography yet it would be impossible to write such a book as this without drawing upon and revealing the author's very personal convictions and conversion to God in all his Beauty. Quotations from many sources – from Plato and Augustine to Kandinsky and Sister Wendy Becket, and countless other references to poets and artists – all suggest a personal journey as well as a crammed 'common place' book.

Like many others, he fastens on Saint Augustine's awakening to God and to Beauty: 'Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new'. But it is also God the Creator whose beauty is reflected in all his creation. Beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder but is there in its own right, and could not be otherwise. Jesus is the incarnation of Beauty. It would be as accurate to translate his words 'I am the beautiful Shepherd', and that beauty has been reflected in countless buildings, pictures and artifacts, whether specifically Christian or not.

To see the world through the eyes of God is to see the world of his beauty. It also betrays all that is unbeautiful in our own lives and leads to the curious, persistent sense of dissatisfaction that can haunt our spiritual lives. He has a particularly sensitive, short

chapter on *The Human Longing* which touches on this.

'Must I be content with discontent?', he quotes from Edward Thomas, looking for 'the happiness I fancy fit to dwell in beauty's presence', and comments, 'The yearning aroused by the experience of beauty is a longing for God himself, for communion with his beauty.'

It is a rich and rewarding book.

Michael SSF

Michael Taylor

Not Angels but Agencies

The Ecumenical Response to Poverty - A Primer

SCM Press, 1995, £7.95

On one level, Michael Taylor's book is history, recounting the development – through numerous conferences and institutions – of the ecumenical family's involvement in the developing world. At a deeper level, it is an articulate critique of the recurrent questions asked of Christian relief and development agencies and those who work for them.

Taylor re-assesses the eternal question of whether Christian concern for the materially poor should always go hand-in-hand with mission, does this always give rise to 'rice-bowl Christians'? Is the gospel primarily good news for the sinner or good news for the poor? This crude typology clearly affects the Christian approach to ministry to the poor. Taylor does not really give an answer, concluding that any ecumenical venture will be divided on the issue.

Another important theme dealt with is whether local projects in developing countries are sufficient to ameliorate poverty sustainably. Should not the available energy be directed to the attack on structural inequality? Are these projects just treating the symptoms, offering a good conscience to Christians at a cheap price? The solution, according to Taylor, is 'to walk on two legs' reacting to present suffering while working to prevent it in the future. The real strength of his analysis lies in the re-examination of buzz words such as 'participation' and 'empowerment' in the light of Christian values. For example, have Christian ethics created a concept of power which can be applied to the fear Northern churches have of sharing power with the churches of the South?

Despite his critique of the more idealistic approaches, Taylor re-affirms the key belief that our theology in the North has been conditioned by the benefits of successful economies and insists that it is in action and struggle on behalf of the poor that we learn how to apply our faith to what sometimes appear to be insurmountable problems.

However, what is specifically Christian about this struggle? Ultimately, all the disciplines (economics, sociology, etc.) as applied to development ask three questions: what is the world we are dealing with?; what goals should we set?; what means will achieve these goals? Christian insights can

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help in the search for the answers.

Whatever the achievement and progress of the ecumenical agencies, the absolute number of poor in the world continues to grow as the gap between rich and poor widens. Christians are called to engage in this world in costly, patient and imaginative ways – as the ecumenical agencies have been trying to do in the last fifty years.

This book is much more than a textbook, as Michael Taylor suggests in his introduction. It is a timely re-evaluation from a Christian perspective of those issues which dominate secular development agencies – and as such provides much food for thought.

Nigel P Eltringham

Hannah Ward & Jennifer Wild (editors)
Human Rites

Worship resources for an age of change
Mowbray, 1995, £16.99

Human Rites is not a book to read but to pray and experience. Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild have grouped liturgies and other worship materials corresponding to the principal events in the life of Christ, underscoring their incarnational and Christological basis. They include some evocative and powerful language of prayerful hope and trust in God's presence to us in various events of human life. These range from the now expected and required, like celebrating the menarche, to the less-usually observed needs after a miscarriage or abortion. Yet this is not only a women's liturgical resource. There are liturgies with diverse histories, adaptations of familiar forms like the Advent 'O' antiphons or from the Book of Common Prayer, 'a leave-taking of a house after separation or divorce', prayer meditations. A big, evocative book, the editors surprisingly eschewed attempts at easy inclusivity. But this is not a tolerance of sexist laziness in the guise of preserving

'more beautiful' language. Sacramental in intensity, while biblically-based and participative in structure and scope, there are many fine words and moments here. Contributors include familiar names like Miriam Therese Winter, Jim Cotter, Brian Wren and the Iona Community with international and ecumenical offerings from churches in Africa, New Zealand/Aotearoa and Australia. *Human Rites* is a resource for deep mining in the cause of creative liturgies or even as an addition to more formal acts of worship.

Janette Gray RSM

Sister Janette is a Religious Sister of Mercy studying for a doctorate at Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

Hans Küng and Waler Jens

A Dignified Dying

SCM Press 1995, £9.95

Christians have no reason to fear death itself, but often feel deep anxiety about the process of dying. Will it be unnecessarily protracted by medical science? Will dignity be lost? Will the burden of care become so great that the physical and emotional resources of those we love are pushed to breaking point?

Hans Küng and Walter Jens, theologian and literary critic respectively, argue strongly in this book for personal responsibility in establishing the thresholds. For Küng, there is a philosophical and theological imperative: 'God does not want us to foist responsibility on him that we ourselves can and should bear. With freedom, God has also given human beings the right to utter self-determination.' Walter Jens turns to modern literary sources to promote the right of the sick and dying to be able to die in peace and dignity – 'a dignified dying that is not imposed from outside but is desired by individuals.'

The euthanasia debate is not going to go away. We cannot just trivialise it as the inevitable preoccupation of our consumer expendable society. Both Küng and Jens make their plea for self-determination from the premise that life is sacred. They assert that an all-merciful God, who has given men and women freedom and responsibility in their lives, has also left to dying people the responsibility for making a conscientious decision about the manner and time of their deaths.

Stopping short of arguing for an unlimited right to voluntary death, this important book nevertheless challenges traditional teaching. In the final chapter, written especially for the English edition, Küng takes issue with the Vatican and the Pope, focussing on his encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. This colourful finale misses the opportunity to look elsewhere, for instance towards the Hospice Movement, which rejects voluntary euthanasia but sets out to help people experience 'a dignified dying', arguably by a better way.

Christopher Chessun

Revd Christopher Chessun is Vicar of St Dunstan's, Stepney.



Theology in the pew

by Mary Welsh
Companion of SSF

By 'theology', in this context, we mean thinking which challenges, and may appear to undermine, the tradition of the Church based on the Bible and the Creeds. 'The person in the pew' is an abstraction, a composite animal, which has as many differing views as the individuals which make it up. That is one of the glories of the Anglican scene: people are allowed and even encouraged to think for themselves.

Some show as sturdy a resistance to new thinking as they do to changes in liturgy, ministry or parochial administration. Others are stimulated and even feel liberated by change: they welcome new forms of liturgy, women in the priesthood and even attitudes to the miraculous which are less literalist than they used to be.

It depends very much on who you are, and where you are, on how the thoughts of today's theologians reach you in the pew. If the preachers are reading new theology and distil any of it into their sermons, some of it may sink into your consciousness. How you react to it may depend largely on your view of the preacher. If you like, admire, respect him or her, you are less likely to be incensed by, say, the idea that the Incarnation is central to the Christian faith but the Virgin Birth does not have to be taken literally. Even then, your own background and cast of mind will affect your reactions.

How else does contemporary theology reach lay people? Much of it does so through press, radio and television, which inevitably dramatise, take out of context, warp and highlight bits of sermons, reports and controversies, as in the recent headlines on Hell and programmes on bones found near Jerusalem. Unless leaders in parishes do their best, by sermons and magazine articles, to acquaint people with new thinking and discoveries in a constructive way, it is the media's distortions which remain with them, often causing distress.

Unfortunately, it seems incredibly difficult to get people to read for themselves and/or to come together in groups to thrash things out. This again varies from person to person and place to place, but one suspects that loving God with all your *mind* is not a top priority for most people.

Those of us who are theologically trained or of an academic cast of mind have a duty to explore new approaches to the faith: to read, assimilate and discuss with people; to sift and adapt our thoughts and share what we learn. But for such people there are two pit-falls to beware of. The first is that, however fascinating their thinking may be, it has to be looked at, not only as it appears to them, but in the light of its possible effect

on the more conservative, less academic Christian. This places on the 'theologians' a great responsibility to be selective in where, when and how to share new ideas and to be skilful in transmuting them into a form which can be grasped by people unversed in their way (stories rather than technical jargon, for instance – taking a hint from that supreme teacher, Jesus of Nazareth).

The other pitfall is to assume that the mind (especially the theological mind) is more important than 'heart, soul and strength'. Some of the most profound insights into Christian faith and life come from men and women who are not trained academically or theologically, but see and understand in the way of an artist or a poet, or with simple common sense. The 'ordinary' person in the pew is often growing and maturing in ways which do not depend on acquaintance with the writings of theologians, either the Fathers or our contemporaries or the generations between.

We do have to remember, however, that our concern should be also with people who do *not* occupy pews. If they think, as many

do, that 'science' has disproved religion or that Christians believe a lot of nonsense, it is important that their Christian friends should have grappled enough with such views to be able to convince them that they are mistaken.

Mutual respect and concern between the two types of Christian will go a long way towards understanding. We might benefit, too, from having at least one 'theologian', ordained or lay, in every parish – or at least deanery – who can 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest' new thinking and share it in as many ways as possible with congregations.

Bultmann, looked upon by many as one of the most disruptive theologians of this century, was well aware that doctrine came second to living for the Christian. He taught, for instance, that believing in the cross of Christ is not so much a matter of deciding the date of the crucifixion or even of contemplating doctrines of the atonement, as of "making Christ's cross one's own."

That is a good perspective for us all.



Revd Mary Welsh is a priest in Bath & Wells Diocese and was Vice-Principal of Gilmore House.

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